

2001; Parse, 1999). According to Parse (1999), the discipline of nursing is the knowledge base (nursing theories), and the profession consists of those who are guided in their practice by the knowledge base. The profession is "persons educated in the discipline according to nationally regulated, defined, and monitored standards . . . set up to preserve health care safety for members of society" (Parse, 1999, p. 275). Members of the profession are responsible for regulation and standards of practice and education based on disciplinary knowledge (Parse, 1999). In the case of nursing, the knowledge required by members of the profession is very broad in scope, encompassing knowledge from the natural sciences, medicine, the social sciences, ethics, and law, as well as nursing theoretical knowledge. For instance, nurses must know about acute and chronic health conditions and they must have expertise in administering medications, performing diagnostic tests and procedures, and operating various machines. In other words, nurses must, without a doubt, be able to provide safe, competent, medical care. But, as Mitchell and Cody (1999) point out, the delivery of health care services is facilitated and improved when medical science is complemented by unique nursing knowledge, and this resides in nursing theory. Unique nursing knowledge is essential for establishing nursing's distinct contribution to health care.

Unfortunately, what nurses learn in school continues to focus heavily on knowledge from other disciplines and hardly on nursing theory. Practicing nurses often say that they do not use any particular theory; and yet, all knowledge is inherently theoretical. And so, although many nurses may not recognize the source of their theoretical views, close examination of their practice would show that their knowledge is drawn primarily from medical science, with a smattering of psychology and social science theory. What this means is that nurses often find it difficult to articulate to others what nursing is and, thus, feel invisible and undervalued, even though they may know on a personal level that they make a significant difference to the health and wellbeing of those in their care (Krejci, 1995).

Being able to articulate our unique contribution is crucially important if we expect nursing to be regarded as a discipline and a profession. Nursing theoretical knowledge can guide nurses in talking about their contribution to the health care team. When nurses are unable to articulate what nursing is, they are in danger of being viewed merely as substitute labor, as the sociologist Lindsay (cited in Lindsay, Twohig, & McGillis-Hall, 2003) called nurses at a recent national symposium. In